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MONDALE

STATEMENT OF JOAN A. MONDALE

PAY EQUITY HEARINGS

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- APRIL 3, 1984

Thank you, Chairwoman Oaker. It is an honor to appear before your Subcommittee this morning. By focusing on pay equity, you are addressing an issue of deep, personal concern to me and to my husband. Pay equity is one of the most fundamental issues of economic justice in our time.

More than twenty years ago, when Congress enacted the Equal Pay Act, the average full-time woman worker earned about 60 cents for every dollar earned by a man. Since then, we have sent astronauts to the moon and cracked the genetic code -- but we have not narrowed the gender gap in the wages of American workers.

Today, we must confront this fundamental breach of economic justice. The bills you are considering would require the federal government -- our nation's largest employer -- to abide by its own laws. They would have a tremendous impact on the more than one million women who work for the federal government, and could be a first step toward changing the policies of private employers.

These bills would build upon other recent steps toward pay equity. As Vice President, my husband was proud to work for passage of the Civil Service Reform Act, which required equal pay for work of equal value in federal jobs. And he was proud to work for the signing of an Executive Order that prohibited gender-based discrimination by federal contractors.

In his Presidential campaign, my husband has also proposed a five-point plan that would continue his fight for pay equity. His plan includes: directing the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to publish guidelines on what constitutes gender-based wage discrimination; reviewing the federal wage scale to eliminate such discrimination; establishing a federal pay equity clearinghouse; and, perhaps most important, making the Oval Office a place of moral leadership for pay equity.

Pay equity is a family issue and a poverty issue. It is an aging issue -- because retirement benefits are often based on wages. It is a racial issue -- because black and Hispanic working women are plagued by poverty far more often than men or white women. But above all, it is an issue of human dignity.

There is no one in America more qualified to address this last point than Glennis Ter Wisscha. She is one of the Willmar Eight, a group of eight Minnesota women so outraged by the injustice of wage discrimination that they sacrificed their jobs, their livelihoods, and four years of their lives to fight it. In today's hearing, you'll hear a lot of statistics and explanations. But I doubt if you'll hear anything more compelling than what Ms. Ter Wisscha has to say. Hers is the story of millions of American women who must suffer the pain of being paid less than they know they are worth.

As a woman, as the mother of a daughter who is just starting her career, and as someone who has talked with thousands of American women over the past year, I applaud your efforts today as the first step toward ensuring that the story of the Willmar Eight is not repeated in the future. Thank you.